

NH Dredge Management Task Force Meeting Minutes – October 21, 2009

The meeting was held on Wednesday, October 21, 2009 from 1:30 PM to 3:00 PM at the Department of Environmental Services/New Hampshire Coastal Program Office, 50 International Drive, Pease Tradeport, Portsmouth, NH.

Introductions/Announcements

Chairman Chris Williams asked members to introduce themselves. The list of attendees follows.

Attending members in alphabetical order:

Robert Boeri, Massachusetts CZM
Valerie Cappola, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)
Chuck Gilboy, Staff for Congresswoman Shea-Porter
Olga Guza-Pabst, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Mark Habel, ACOE
Richard Heidebrecht, ACOE
Carol Henderson, NH Fish and Game Department (NHF&G)
Sarah Holmes, Senator Shaheen
Richard Holt Sr., Portsmouth Pilots - Moran Towing Corp.
Eric Nestler, Normandeau Associates
Shachak Peeri, UNH Center for Coastal & Ocean Mapping
Tom Prasol, Senator Gregg
Catherine Rogers, ACOE
Tracy Shattuck, Pease Development Authority-Division of Ports and Harbors
Fred Short, UNH Jackson Estuarine Laboratory
Michael Sills, DES Waste Management Division
Chris Williams, Chairman, New Hampshire Coastal Program (NHCP)

Staff:

Mary Power, NHCP

Legislative Update

Chairman Williams asked Sarah Holmes from Senator Shaheen's office to provide a Congressional/legislative update. Ms. Holmes stated that the joint House and Senate Environment and Water Conference Report passed on October 15th. She stated that the following New Hampshire projects were included in the Report: 1) Cocheco River - \$2 million; 2) Simplex Shoal - \$500,000; and 3) Hampton Harbor (Section 107) – unspecified amount. The report currently awaits the President's signature.

Chuck Gilboy of Congresswoman Shea-Porter's office stated that the Water Resources Development Appropriations Act passed the House. It includes \$2 million for the Cocheco River maintenance dredging project and \$130,000 for maintenance dredging of the Hampton Harbor entrance channel.

Project Updates

■ *Piscataqua River Turning Basin Feasibility Study* - Dick Heidebrecht, ACOE, stated that in September, the ACOE convened a meeting with state agency staff from New Hampshire and Maine to identify sites for the disposal of the material from the proposed Turning Basin project. The majority of the material, which is comprised predominantly of sand with some rock, will be dredged from Maine waters. As a result, the ACOE has preliminarily determined that the total volume of dredged material will be split equally between Maine and New Hampshire. At this time, the preferred disposal location in New Hampshire is offshore of the beach at Wallis Sands State Park in Rye, while the preferred location in Maine is offshore of the beach at Long Sands Beach in York. Mr. Heidebrecht made it clear, however, that while there appears to be a need for sand at Long Sands Beach, the Town of York has not yet been contacted regarding the proposal. He also stated that the projected total volume of material won't be known until the ACOE completes economic and alternatives analyses that will be used to determine the size and depth of the turning basin.

Mr. Habel, ACOE, stated that while the ACOE hopes to construct the project so as to avoid removing rock, it's likely that some rock will need to be removed. He stated that the ACOE is awaiting a decision from the State of New Hampshire as to where to put the rock. Chairman stated that while an upland site has not been identified, there is an ongoing discussion with the NH Fish & Game Department about using the rock to create a reef somewhere in the vicinity of the mouth of the Piscataqua River. Discussion followed.

Chairman asked if the ACOE has performed, or will perform, any analyses, such as a beach profile, at Wallis Sands State Park to determine how much sand is needed there. Mark Habel stated that it is the state's responsibility to determine how much material is needed. Chairman then stated that while staff from the Department of Resources & Economic Development (DRED)–Division of Parks & Recreation are very interested in having sand placed offshore of the beach, they are concerned with the potential effects the longshore currents may have on the onshore migration of the sand. Specifically, they believe that the majority of the material dredged from Little Harbor in 2001 and deposited offshore of the beach at Wallis Sands State Park for beach replenishment purposes never made it onto the beach. It is their belief that the longshore currents carried a significant portion of the material south. As a potential means of mitigating the effects of the longshore currents, they suggested depositing the sand north of the beach. Mr. Heidebrecht stated that he has been in contact with the University of New Hampshire Ocean Engineering Lab to determine what, if any, information exists on the currents in the vicinity of Wallis Sands State Park. He also stated that he has been searching for bathymetric information of the offshore area as well. Mr. Habel stated that nearshore disposal is the ACOEs' preferred alternative. He stated that although sand could be placed directly onto the beach, the additional costs would be substantial. Chairman said he will follow up with UNH and with the DRED-Division of Park & Recreation.

Mr. Heidebrecht then stated that the ACOE recently completed a new survey that located the caissons for the River Road terminal. The ACOE intends to establish a berthing area in front of that terminal and start the turning basin from that point. Discussion followed.

Dr. Fred Short, UNH, stated that the eelgrass beds on both sides of the river in the proposed dredging area are re-establishing but currently have relatively low density. He requested that the ACOE use caution to avoid eelgrass in these areas. Mr. Heidebrecht asked if new maps depicting the location of the eelgrass in the project area have been developed. Dr. Short stated that new eelgrass maps have been developed. Olga Guza, EPA, asked what measures the ACOE has used in other dredging projects to protect eelgrass beds. Mr. Habel stated that for the dredging project in Scituate, MA the ACOE used a combination of silt curtains and the environmental bucket but these measures were not effective. He continued by stating that the ACOE will re-survey the area and develop a plan to protect eelgrass beds. Dr. Short then asked when construction of the turning basin project will begin. Mr. Habel stated that it probably won't begin until the 2011-2012 season because it has to be authorized by Congress as a line item program.

■ *Cocheco River Maintenance Dredge* – Although Project Manager, Mike Walsh, ACOE, was unable to attend the meeting, he provided the following information which was presented by Chairman Williams. The joint House and Senate Conference Report includes \$2 million for the Cocheco River maintenance dredging project. If the Conference Report is ratified and signed by the President, the \$2 million will be combined with the \$1.8 million that the ACOE currently has available for the project. This money should enable the ACOE to complete the dredging component of the project and meet its financial obligations to the City of Dover for its use of the disposal facility. Mr. Walsh has already been in contact the ACOE's 8A (small business) project contractor who will be teaming up with the contractor who performed the dredging work in 2006-2007. The ACOE will likely not begin contract negotiations until late spring of next year. This is due, in part, to avoid variations in fuel prices that may occur over the winter. The ACOE anticipates that dredging will re-commence in November 2010. Mr. Walsh will be reviewing existing state permits to determine if they need to be modified. Dr. Short suggested that if the project incorporates a monitoring component, pre-project monitoring should also be conducted to obtain baseline conditions. He suggested that a buoy be placed near the General Sullivan Bridge to monitor turbidity and other water conditions. Discussion followed regarding the type of monitoring and best location for a monitoring buoy.

■ *Hampton Section 107 Feasibility Study Report* - Dick Heidebrecht, ACOE, stated that as a result of a revised economic analysis, the ACOE is now proposing to dredge to 9 feet mlw, as opposed to 8 feet mlw. As a result, the total volume of dredge material will increase. Discussion followed. Chairman asked about the status of the Feasibility Study Report. Mr. Heidebrecht stated that the Report is currently being reviewed and that an internal draft document is due in November. Mark Habel, ACOE, stated that the internal draft will then go to the ACOE's Division Office in New York. After review by the Division Office, the Report will be released, which will trigger the state's regulatory process and the federal agency review process. Mark Habel then stated that before the

ACOE can assume responsibility for dredging the inner harbor a meeting must be held with PDA-DPH to discuss implementation cost sharing. Chairman asked when that meeting will take place. Mr. Habel stated that the meeting could take place before the ACOE New England District sends the Report to the Division Office. Mr. Heidebrecht stated that he would contact PDA-DPH to schedule the meeting.

Chairman stated that at the last Task Force meeting there was some discussion of erosion occurring between the two walls of the bulkhead of the Hampton/Seabrook 227 project. He asked Mr. Heidebrecht for an update on the situation. Mr. Heidebrecht stated that the area has been surveyed but the ACOE has not yet computed the quantity of eroded material. Mr. Habel stated that the ACOE anticipates using material dredged from the Seabrook anchorage to refill the 227 bulkheads and to fill in the low area that has developed on the far side of the west wall. He also stated that it's likely that the bulkheads will have to be "topped off" every time the Hampton/Seabrook anchorages are dredged. Chairman asked if the ACOE knows where the eroded material is going. Mr. Habel stated that it appears to be depositing in the anchorage.

■ *Sagamore Creek Maintenance Dredge* - Chairman Williams, reporting for Mike Walsh, stated that the ACOE issued the public notice for the project on October 1st, with a comment deadline of November 1st. Chairman stated that the public notice process serves as a way for the ACOE to receive comments and gather information from anyone who may have insight on the project. After the Nov. 1st deadline, the ACOE will begin the coordination process with state and federal agencies, including, in part, National Marine Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, and NHDES. Olga Guza-Pabst, EPA, asked if there is an alternative for disposal of the dredged material if Wallis Sands does not have sufficient capacity. Mark Habel stated that there are several beaches in the area that could potentially accommodate the sand. Chair stated that the beach at Wallis Sands is not only the closest to the project, but it is in need of sand. Discussion followed. Chairman continued by saying that after the state/federal coordination process is complete, the ACOE will use the information gathered to begin the environmental assessment. He also reminded members that the ACOE currently does not have funding for the project, which is projected to cost between \$500,000 and \$750,000. Chairman added that the owner of B&G Marina, which is located downstream from Witch Cove Marina, has notified the ACOE of his interest in having his marina dredged as well. Mike Walsh referred the owner to the Task Force but Chairman has not yet been contacted.

Chairman then stated that based on discussions with Mr. Walsh, the Sagamore Creek (and Portsmouth Back Channels) maintenance dredging project is actually authorized under the Piscataqua River/Portsmouth Harbor federal navigation project. As a result, he asked whether the Sagamore Creek project should be included with the Piscataqua River/Portsmouth Harbor project in future appropriations (or other funding) requests. Mark Habel explained the history of why the two projects were combined and added that the Sagamore Creek and Simplex Shoal projects might be able to be combined. Discussion followed.

■ *Piscataqua River “Simplex Shoal” Maintenance Dredge* – Valerie Cappola, ACOE, stated that the ACOE has not yet determined the exact volume of material that will need to be dredged but based on past projects, it is estimated to be between 10,000-20,000 cubic yards. She stated that the environmental assessment has been written for a volume of up to 50,000 cubic yards just to be safe. The ACOE plans to incorporate language into the environmental assessment that will allow for advanced maintenance dredging. Discussion followed regarding the timing of the project.

■ **Other Business**

Olga Guza-Pabst, EPA, informed the group that the next New England Regional Dredging Team (a.k.a. Sudbury Group) meeting will be held in mid-November at Fort Trumbull in New London, Connecticut. She encouraged task force members to attend the meetings. She then briefly reviewed the agenda with members.

Mark Habel, ACOE, asked if the states of New Hampshire and Maine are continuing discussions about ocean disposal sites. Chairman stated that while identifying practicable offshore and onshore dredge material disposal sites remains a top priority for New Hampshire, he has not had any recent discussions with officials from Maine regarding this issue. He reminded members that for the last two years the state has submitted a Congressional appropriations request for a dredge material disposal siting study. He stated that he anticipates that the state will submit a similar funding request for the study during the next (FY2011) Congressional appropriations cycle. It was asked if the state of Maine is still interested in such a study. Chairman stated that while Maine officials have in the past expressed interest in such a study, he’s not sure of Maine’s current position on the issue. Sarah Holmes, Senator Shaheen’s representative, asked the Chairman to remind her at the beginning of the next appropriations cycle so that she can check with Maine’s Congressional delegation.

Valerie Cappola, ACOE, stated that while she was updating the environmental assessment for the Piscataqua River Simplex Shoal project, she read that the Town of Newington had passed an ordinance prohibiting the placement of dredged material in the Town. She stated that she’d contacted the Town and checked the Town’s web site but had not been able to confirm whether such an ordinance exists. Chairman stated that he’d research this issue for her.

■ **Schedule next DMTF meeting.**

Chairman scheduled the next meeting for Wednesday, January 20, 2010, 1:30 PM at the DES/NHCP Office in Portsmouth. Please Note: **Due to a scheduling conflict, the meeting was rescheduled for January 27, 2010 at 1:30 PM at the DES/NHCP Office in Portsmouth.**

Adjourned, 3:00 PM

